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**“I use the library sometimes just to lose myself”: School libraries supporting students’**

**wellbeing and flourishing**

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## **“I use the library sometimes just to lose myself”: School libraries supporting students’ wellbeing and flourishing**

### **Abstract**

This study draws on data from a larger design-based study on the impact of library redesign in three Singapore secondary schools, focusing on students’ responses about their revitalised library spaces. Focus group data (N = 42) were analysed. Findings revealed that students appreciated a comfortable and peaceful learning environment that was welcoming and valued choice and opportunities for diverse activities within the library. Reading for pleasure, known to enhance wellbeing, is also supported by a well-resourced and designed school library. Crucially, students valued choice for quiet and noise-tolerant spaces within the library for different activities. The study underscores school libraries’ significance as multifaceted environments that foster student wellbeing, bringing about the need for continued investment in the enhancement and promotion of school library spaces. Recommendations for supporting student wellbeing through the school library are offered and it is suggested that school libraries consider their role to support student flourishing.

**Keywords:** school libraries, wellbeing, reading for pleasure, learning environments, human flourishing

## Introduction

Studies have shown that school libraries can boost students' reading engagement (Wood et al., 2020), improve students' literacy and numeracy test scores (Lance et al., 2000), and foster positive learning attitudes (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018b). However, apart from these benefits, more recent research has started to shed light on the capacity of school libraries to support student wellbeing (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018b; Harper, 2019; Joing, 2023; Merga, 2021; Willis et al., 2019). Indeed, the school library acts not as a mere repository of books, but as a safe sanctuary for students who need a place to relax and recharge (Merga, 2021). The library environment can help students feel secure and comfortable, have some ownership over the space and experience freedom (Altenburger, 2021, Butler et al., 2017) within a busy school day. Through the arrangement and design of its material and spatial elements, the school library can contribute to feelings of safety, comfort and belonging in students (Tarrant and Roche, 2022). Furthermore, by providing a conducive environment for reading and learning and enabling peer interaction, school libraries can cater to the diverse needs of its users, thereby enhancing the wellbeing of students.

The role of the library as a space for student wellbeing comes at a crucial time, when there are concerns about how schools are supporting students' wellbeing in a post-Covid world (Govorova et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2021). Within Singapore, with a seismic shift in the last two decades from an achievement-oriented system towards one that focuses on holistic education, there has been more emphasis in the policy discourse on how to support student wellbeing (Ng, 2020). In 2023, the National Strategy for Mental Health and Wellbeing was launched to strengthen the ecosystem within which student wellbeing can be taken care of (Ministry of Education, 2023).

However, the concept of wellbeing is often ill-defined in actual implementation (Ng, 2020). One definition of wellbeing from the PISA 2015 survey describes wellbeing as

“a dynamic state characterised by students experiencing the ability and opportunity to fulfil their personal and social goals. It encompasses multiple dimensions of students’ lives, including: cognitive, psychological, physical, social and material. It can be measured through subjective and objective indicators of competencies, perceptions, expectations and life conditions.” (Borgonovi & Pál, 2016)

In another explanation, Seligman (2012) ties wellbeing with flourishing and offers the acronym PERMA to encompass five wellbeing elements: (1) Positive emotion, (2) Engagement or being in the flow, (3) Relationship, (4) Meaning or purpose in life and (5) Accomplishment. Across these definitions, it is clear that rather than a singular focus on students’ academic grades, school should be a place that feels safe and empowers students’ relationships and learning. Informal spaces within the school such as the school library can be a central space for cultivating student feelings of wellbeing and flourishing within the school environment (Willis et al., 2019).

Within Singapore, there is growing recognition of the importance of school libraries for reading and learning (Loh, 2023). Between 2019 to 2021, the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) partnered with the research team from the National Institute of Education (NIE) to redesign three school library spaces using design thinking to inform the library renovation and refreshing of the book collection and programming. The research team documented the impact of the refreshed school libraries over one academic year, collecting observation, focus group/ interview and survey data. Although wellbeing was not an initial focus, it emerged as a core theme from an analysis of the focus group/interview data. Keeping in mind that these three libraries were newly renovated using design thinking principles and in consultation with the student population, we sought to answer the following research questions: What wellbeing elements did students experience in their revitalized school libraries? What improvements did they want for their school libraries?

While there have been studies in Europe (Joing, 2019) and Australia (Willis et al., 2019) about school libraries as spaces for wellbeing, this is the first study in an Asian context. This study thus contributes to a growing body of research about how school libraries can support student wellbeing, adding to the evidence base required for advocacy to inform policy and practice.

### **Literature Review**

School libraries should be inclusive spaces, serving the needs of diverse students (Horan, 2018; Hunsinger, 2015). The American Association of School Librarians' National School Library Standards includes a commitment that school libraries and librarians should "demonstrate an understanding and commitment to inclusiveness and diversity in the learning community" (AASL, 2018). In the literature review, we highlight how school libraries support reading for pleasure, other forms of student wellbeing and document the research on how learning environments can enhance student wellbeing.

#### **School libraries supporting reading for pleasure for student wellbeing**

Numerous studies have shown the association between reading for pleasure, positive reading attitudes and wellbeing (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018a; Levine et al., 2022; Merga, 2022). Students who read for pleasure are more likely to experience numerous benefits pertaining to their academic achievement, cognitive development, and literacy skills such as vocabulary and reading comprehension (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018b; Todd, 2021). Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2018a) reported that youth who enjoy reading have higher mental wellbeing scores than those who do not. A plausible reason for this is that reading books for pleasure offers an escape from the stressors of everyday life and can be a way to regulate emotion and bring enjoyment and peace (Merga, 2022). This is also supported by

Levine et al. (2022) who highlighted the potential reading for pleasure has for reducing psychological distress. During the pandemic, children and youths reported that reading was a source of enjoyment for them (Collins et al., 2022; Todd, 2021; Loh & Sun, 2022).

School libraries play a pivotal role in promoting reading for pleasure and embedding a positive reading culture within the school. It is explicitly stated in the International Federation of School Libraries Guidelines (2015) that since “access to reading materials is a key factor for developing enthusiastic and skilled readers” (p. 39), the school library collection should ensure access to quality print and digital fiction and non-fiction texts. Furthermore, there should be the provision of informal reading areas and programmes to cultivate reading for pleasure. Indeed, school libraries provide students with access to a diverse range of reading materials that pique their interests (Ahlfeld, 2020; Kordeliski, 2017; Merga, 2021; Todd, 2021). Offering a wide selection of books allows students the freedom and agency to choose the books they want to read, fostering excitement and a sense of ownership, which effectively encourages reading for pleasure (Ahlfeld, 2020; Kaaland, 2017; Koorevaar, 2022). Furthermore, school libraries serve as sanctuaries for students who want a quiet and conducive space for uninterrupted independent reading (Ahlfeld, 2020; Kordeliski, 2017; Todd, 2021).

The presence of a qualified school librarian further enhances the capacity of the school library to cultivate lifelong readers (Ahlfeld, 2020; Gagen-Spriggs, 2020; Merga, 2020b). Kordeliski (2017) noted that librarians prioritise student-centricity in school libraries by tailoring programmes that fit the needs and wants of readers. One example of how librarians can build a reading community is by offering opportunities for book discussions where students can share about their favourite books with their peers (Ahlfeld, 2020; Kaaland, 2017; Merga, 2020b).

### **School libraries supporting other forms of student wellbeing**

Other than supporting reading for pleasure, school libraries contribute to student wellbeing through their social affordances, their function as safe spaces and their role in the promotion and resourcing of wellbeing initiatives. Students can interact with their friends in the school library, nurturing positive peer relationships and contributing to a harmonious school climate which can be optimised to enhance overall student wellbeing (Altenburger, 2021; Kirkland, 2021). School libraries also operate as safe spaces for all users. This is done by creating designated zones for quiet and mindfulness, as well as ensuring inclusivity through diversity in resources (Kirkland, 2021).

Students valued the school library as a space where they had the autonomy to exercise control over their time and choice of activity (Willis et al., 2019). In an ethnographic study of an urban school library in France, Joing (2020) highlights how the school library served as a refuge for marginalized, younger and “feel bad” students and avid readers. Similarly, in Australia, Merga (2021) found that students saw the library as their “safe space”. One student in her study used the space as part of their pastoral planning with their school’s pastoral care coordinator, choosing to visit the library when they needed some alone space. Furthermore, within the hustle and bustle of the school day, students chose to use the library to relax and recharge. Thus, it is important to recognise that the school library’s role extends beyond the academic and is key to enhancing student autonomy and learning within the school context.

### **Learning Environments and Student Wellbeing**

The physical layout and design of school libraries can provide students with a comfortable place to relax and recharge, usually relating to the library’s ambience and furnishings (Merga, 2021; Tarrant & Roche, 2022). In interviews with 44 students from 7 refurbished Australian school libraries about their lived experiences, Willis et al. (2019) found that students valued

spaciousness, technology, social connectedness, choice and control. When asked to imagine their ideal library through drawing and writing, they emphasised connectedness with others and the natural world, peacefulness, adventure and playfulness and integrated technology. Willis et al. (2019) call for more attention to the design of school library spaces to support student wellbeing in schools.

Furthermore, Wallace (2020) highlights the importance of differentiated spaces that support various types of learning, activities, and interactions to provide a nurturing environment which encourages learning and creativity. By positioning school libraries as a space with a host of different uses, they can pique the interests and increase participation of students who may not enjoy reading so that they too may reap the benefits of enhanced mental wellbeing by using the school library (Atherton, 2020; Tarrant and Roche, 2022).

Finally, beyond physical spaces, school libraries also play a valuable role in promoting and facilitating wellbeing initiatives (Merga, 2020c; Tarrant and Roche, 2022). This is done by providing access to mental health resources and educational materials which can boost students' self-management skills, improving their overall wellbeing.

## **Methodology**

This article draws on data from a larger study of reading and school libraries, *Designing School Libraries of the Future (DEV02-20 LCE)* where the research team tracked the impact of library design at three school libraries. Within Singapore, where there has been increased focus on school library improvement for reading and learning, the first author worked with three school libraries to refresh their library spaces for reading and learning (see Loh et al. 2021 for an example). Three different school types were selected for the study to ensure maximum variation. Pseudonyms are used in this article. Conrad Secondary School is a co-educational government school with students of differing proficiencies. Meadows Girls is a

high performing all girls' school with a strong research focus. Yuzu Secondary is a government school moving to a new location at the time of the study, which meant that the principal had more say in the location of the school library within the school grounds. Similar across the schools was a commitment to using design thinking for the student-centred redesign process.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Approval for the research was obtained from the Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board. Students gave their consent to the study and were informed that they could choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. Focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews, guided by semi-structured questions, were conducted to understand the students' responses to the redesign of the school libraries. More specifically, they aimed to elicit the students' reasons for visiting the library, what they liked about the library and the activities they partook in there. We also asked students for feedback about how to improve the library. For the purpose of this study, a total of 23 FGD and interviews were conducted with 42 students (aged 13 to 15-years-old), via Zoom or in person within the school premises. Teachers were asked to help us select non-readers and readers for the FGD/interviews, which were arranged according to the availability of the students (see Table 1). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

*Insert Table 1: Number of Interviews and Interviewees for Each Secondary School*

<b>Secondary School</b>	<b>Number of Focus Groups</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
Conrad	4	9	18
Meadows	3	4	12
Yuzu	3	0	12

The qualitative data were analysed, utilising initial and focused coding to identify patterns and recurring themes among the data to answer the research questions. The constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006) was employed to initial codes in a continual process of sorting and clustering. Focused coding then enabled merging of initial codes and the construction of new, elaborated codes to synthesise the main themes in the data, generating data-driven and empirical categories that informed the findings surrounding the school library and student wellbeing.

### **Findings**

When asked about what they felt about the library, adjectives such as calm, relaxing, peaceful and comfortable were repeated by the students several times. The students' feelings about the library are known as "sense of place" (Cross, 2001; Tuan, 1974) or individual's feelings about their feelings of a particular setting. On the one hand, sense of place is personal, comprising of one's intimate relationship with place. On the other hand, it may also be shared, when individuals have common experiences associated with the place. The students' positive relationship to the library was shaped by firstly, the different elements that constitute the school library, in relation to materials, objects and individuals within the library, and secondly, appreciation that the library served their needs and gave them choice.

#### **The library contributes to feelings of comfort and peace**

Firstly, the library was a haven offering students comfort and peace with its inviting atmosphere that was both physically and environmentally comfortable and its welcoming library staff who were friendly and helpful.

### *Physical comfort*

When asked what they liked about the redesigned school library, a number of students responded that they appreciated the variety of comfortable furniture available, making explicit mention to the installation of swings, addition of cushions and cozy armchairs. One student, Prabu, said, “I like this library more as it has cozy seats. And when you sit on them, it makes you feel like you are at home.” Students feel a sense of security and belonging in the school library, which could be a direct result of the physical comfort experienced in the space. Feelings of comfort in the library can also be noted in the responses of other students – another student, Jerome, stated, “The furniture’s like soft, so [you] can relax.” The cozy furniture also aids in the creation of a conducive environment for students to relax and recharge.

### *Environmental comfort*

The material and spatial elements of the library contribute to the ambience, resulting in students’ positive responses towards their libraries. Students described the furnishings of the library as “pretty” (Insyirah), “fancy” (Iris) and “very modern” (Aini). A well-designed and well-furnished school library can enhance the overall atmosphere of the library and boost the comfort level of its users. Students also appreciated little touches that added to the sense of quirkiness or unique identity of their library. For example, Caroline noted that “there’s even a swing in here. It really brightens up the atmosphere”, Lydia stated, “I think I like the pods inside... it’s really quite nice inside.” and Aini said “There’s like a lot of spaces. You can sit there, you can sit on the floor. You can sit at the learning oasis there.”

Adequate natural lighting and acoustic comfort are important for students. Arianna stated, “I think I feel very, like relaxed because they don’t use a lot of lights here,” while Dhia reported feeling “relaxed, ‘cause it’s cold [inside] and outside is hot”. The air-conditioned

space serves as a much-needed refuge from the hot weather outside. Another factor found to contribute to the calm atmosphere is the peace and quiet in the library. Ritu described this in her response, "...it's so calm. People who come here immediately know to keep their voice down... the environment is like that".

### *Library staff*

The presence of friendly and helpful library staff added to students' feelings of comfort. Data from the focus groups showed that the attitude and disposition of the library staff can either attract or deter students from visiting the library. Some students from one of the secondary schools noted the strict demeanour of their current school library assistant, which led to them feeling restricted and controlled. In comparison, the student explained how the former library assistant's welcoming and friendly persona encouraged her to spend more time in the library.

I feel like the old librarian was really nice. And I feel like... She actually encouraged people to come to the library and she was always like smiling, very joyful, and try to get to know students you know, very interactive, it was very easy to talk with her and stuff (Rita).

Students who liked library staff were more likely to visit and enjoy their time at the school library as they felt they had more freedom to do what they wanted. Bhavika, who liked the school librarian, said, "All my librarians love me so, I just go wherever I want in the library."

### **The school library offers choice and serves students' needs**

Affirming the findings in Willis et al. (2019), students valued libraries that served their needs and offered them choice in terms of offering different resources, spaces and furniture for different self-chosen activities.

### *Functional considerations*

The school library must be able to accommodate the demand of students visiting the library. Bayu said, “I’m glad it’s big enough, like got a lot of people.” This idea of a large space was echoed by many other students who appreciated the spaciousness of the library. Miles reported feeling “stress-free” in the library, attributing this to “the surroundings... the ceiling is very high. It’s like very spacious.” As Yuzu could envision its library during the building stage, it occupied a large centrally located place at the school’s drop-off point. A double height ceiling added to the sense of spaciousness. Regardless of the size of the library, having sufficient space within the school library serves as the basic requirement for offering students the freedom to engage in socialising, learning and reading activities of their choice.

### *Learning needs*

Students who visit the library to revise or complete their work require a conducive environment for learning. This is especially crucial given reports by students that the library can get quite noisy during recess times or after school, which is when the library experiences the highest volume of visitors. In a FGD with Athira, Maria, Fahrin and Susan from Yuzu Secondary, it was highlighted that the school library was “not peaceful” during these times. Maria elaborated that the library would get “so noisy [that she] cannot focus”. Students thus appreciated having quiet spaces that allow for individual study or group work.

This separation of spaces for studying created quiet zones that were ideal for students’ independent self-study. Meadows Secondary’s school library consisted of two storeys, and the redesign took students’ feedback into account, designating the second storey a quiet zone purely for studying while restricting noisier activities to the lower level.

...those who want to read, they also want to chit-chat. Sometimes, it’s very distracting but as for Meadows’ library, now there’s a second like a second level for studying and

the first level is just for reading and browsing books. I think that is the good thing about the library. At least, there's a separation between those who want to chit-chat and read their books from those who seriously want to study and do their homework (Beomgyu).

The same effect of quiet zones can be achieved through furniture design and arrangement, such as the installation of collaboration tables or individual and group discussion pods. Many students cited these features in their libraries, highlighting that they used these spaces for self-study or for discussions for group projects.

### *Choice to be alone or socialise*

Despite the peace and quiet being characteristic of a school library, school libraries are also places that encourage socialising among friends. Lydia stated, "It has some places where we can relax and read books together", while Arianna said, "people come here just to meet their friends after school, just have a chat". The space facilitates peer interactions which involve activities that range from studying or reading to chatting or simply relaxing together. By providing opportunities for students to interact with friends, the school library can thus enhance overall student wellbeing. Furthermore, just like how the school library provides designated zones for self-study and group discussions, it provides spaces for students to be alone or with their friends.

The way they put the tables here like you can get privacy. If you want, you can sit outside there and look out of the windows. Let's say you're doing your laptop work, you can sit there and do. Then if you have a group discussion, you can sit there. Then if you want to just read a book, they have comfy chairs where you can sit on it and read (Prabu).

Through furniture arrangement, tables and seats are positioned such that students can still find privacy despite being in a busy place. The library serves as an in-between space, where students can just chill and “sometimes go to lose themselves” (Vinod).

### *Reading needs*

It has been shown that reading for pleasure has the potential to reduce psychological distress, offering students an escape from the stressors of daily life (Levine et al., 2022; Merga, 2022). Across the FGD, many students shared that the school library offered a conducive and quiet environment to unwind by reading during the school day. Caroline lamented, “I don't have the time to go after school. And really, recess is the only time that I have to actually relax, wind down and read a book at the school library.” Lydia said, “When you sit there, it is slightly more comfortable, and you can read at your own pace and you have something to lean against. So you feel more relaxed.”

And it's always very quiet [in the library]. The one flaw about sitting at the benches outside my classroom that I didn't like is that there are a lot of people coming up and down the stairs. So it's really, really noisy. I can never focus on my book. But at least in the library it's much quieter. You don't have so many people walking in and down. And most people just come here to relax and enjoy a book. So there's not a lot of chatter. And it makes focusing on my book much easier and I can finish it a lot quicker also (Caroline).

Students also elaborated that they appreciated it when the book collection was interesting and relevant to them as it allowed them to find new reading material.

They have a large variety of books and they have different subjects that you can read, they have English, mother tongue, (unclear) geography and sometimes I will go there

because my house doesn't always have the required books that I like for me to read (Lydia).

Some students appreciated the different genres available in the library, making mention of fiction and non-fiction books, manga, comics, even the school yearbooks. They also liked “new books” rather than books that are “damaged” or “old” (Prabu).

Catering to reading needs of students also includes facilitating the ease of finding books that they want to read. Pointing to a curated section books displayed by genre in the Meadows school library, Koala commented, “I like that they actually categorise the books. It’s easier to find, other than going to find the call number.” Smiley highlighted that the well-placed New Arrivals section impressed her and helped pique her interest in books that she “personally wanted to read there in [the] school library”.

With comfortable furniture, a quiet environment and a quality book collection, reading for pleasure becomes a viable choice for students during the school day, thus supporting their wellbeing.

### **School library improvements**

When asked for suggestions for the library, students’ comments centred around the collection and activities in their libraries. For example, students made suggestions as to how else the collection can be improved by asking for more current titles or titles they would like. Given the multicultural context of Singapore, some students also suggested that the collection in other languages such as Chinese, Malay or Tamil could be improved.

But as someone who likes to read Chinese, I think our school should have more Chinese books for teenagers because most of the books are primary school level - not that hard (Xin Yi).

Another common request for improvement was with regard to social activities such as book clubs and game rooms. Cassidy recalled her Primary School library, “I remember we had this game room inside for some reason. Like there’d be like board games and those kind of stuff... you are free to go inside and play.” Students thus recognise the social dimension of the school library and its potential to enhance interactions among peers. Suggestions also revolved around reading for pleasure with Lydia suggesting, “maybe they could have a book club you know, discuss about the books that you've read and you can share the things that the book has to tell you,” while Xin Yi said, “I think maybe the library can have some activities or promote some of the Chinese books that are really fun for secondary school students.”

### **Discussion**

The findings from our study of secondary school students affirmed recent research that well-designed and well-resourced school libraries play a vital role in supporting student wellbeing by offering them a space within school which is attractive and caters to their learning and socioemotional needs. Students in all three revitalised school libraries appreciated how the new libraries seem to cater to their needs, offering support, safety and comfort for all its users. The design of the library, built with students’ feedback in mind, enabled the adolescent students to feel a “sense of place” (Cross, 2001; Tuan, 1990), that is, a specific relation to place and community. Students reported that the library met their need for comfort and safety with factors such as the homeliness element (Tarrant and Roche, 2022). Differentiated learning options made them feel welcome and enabled creativity (Wallace, 2020). The aesthetics and little touches contributed to students’ experience of a school library that brought them and their classmates together through their experiences of a common space.

In line with earlier research (Altenburger, 2021; Butler et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2019), our findings showed that the freedom to choose what they could do within their

libraries gave students ownership of their learning. A new understanding we bring to this field is that students desire differentiated spaces that support various types of activities and interaction. Although there has been emphasis towards the inclusion of collaborative spaces that are more noise tolerant in library spaces, the findings show that students continue to appreciate the library as a quiet place for reading or studying. In line with studies that highlight the need to offer students a quiet space where they can practise mindfulness which can help students deal and manage their stress (Kirkland, 2021), planners and educators need to remember that students need both quiet and noisy collaborative spaces within the school library. Furthermore, attending to lighting, acoustic and thermal comfort are primary considerations in school library design.

The findings affirm earlier research that the design and organisation of the school library's environment as well as its furnishings can do much to improve students' responses to and use of the space (Merga, 2021; Tarrant & Roche, 2022; Willis et al., 2019). It contributes to existing research by highlighting that listening to students to learn about their desires and needs can help schools design school library spaces, curate resources and craft programmes that will better meet their needs (Loh, 2023; Willis et al., 2019). Willis et al. (2019) noted the importance of constantly evaluating library spaces to ensure that they are inclusive, supporting students "diverse educational, physical and emotional needs" (p. 135), which will be specific to each school context. For example, escaping from the cold into a warm library in France (Joing, 2023) or from the heat into a cool library in Singapore are place-specific considerations with the common objective of ensuring thermal comfort for the students.

The study reiterates the importance of the school library as a space that supports reading for pleasure (Levine, 2022; Merga, 2022). While the school libraries in the study have created spaces for reading, which the students appreciate, the findings show that the quality and quantity of the book collection, along with programmes such as book discussions (Merga,

2020b) are still required to satisfy students' reading needs. Moreover, the presence of a friendly and welcoming librarian can further encourage their usage of the school library (Altenburger, 2021). This underscores that the redesign of school library spaces cannot just take place in a vacuum, but must include planning for the books, resources and programmes that are to fill the space. Furthermore, continued management and improvement of the library space are necessary to ensure that it meets the developing needs of students.

### **Conclusion**

As adolescent students age and workload from school increases, they have less time for themselves and may feel increased stress. Within a highly structured school day of lessons and responsibilities, informal spaces take on increased significance for a holistic, integrative approach to encouraging students' wellbeing and learning in schools (Hughes et al., 2019). As an unstructured "singular" (Joing, 2023, p. 3) space within the school where they can exercise their imagination and find balance between their needs to be alone and with others, for learning as well as relaxing, the school library is a vital space for student learning and wellbeing.

Significantly, attending to students' comfort is a matter of social justice. Studying survey data (N= 6,246) from the 2019 National Literacy Trust Annual Literacy survey in the UK, Wood et al. (2019) found that students eligible for free school meals with access to comfortable school libraries and access to materials are more likely to enjoy reading and writing within the safe haven of the school library. During the pandemic, Soulen & Tedrow (2021) found that school library closures restricting access to library materials were disruptive to students' learning. Within Singapore, Loh & Sun (2022) found that students on financial assistance were more likely to utilise the school than the public library, emphasising that the location of the school library within the school premises was a core factor for students'

reliance on it. The school library thus may be even more vital for students who come from less well-resourced homes.

A key limitation of this study is that it focused mainly on interview data from a small group of students rather than the broader student population. Future studies should make use of observational and survey data to triangulate FGD/interview data for a more holistic view. However, the students' voices offer insights into what one group of students have to say about their school library. Furthermore, since these libraries were recently renovated and refreshed, the study affirms that investing funds into redesigning evidence-based and student-centred school library spaces can yield positive impact on students' wellbeing.

While the article has focused on how the school library has contributed to student wellbeing, it may be that the conversation about contemporary school libraries need to expand to asking about how school libraries can be equitable spaces where students have the opportunity to flourish, that is, to develop their potential through engagement in meaningful relationships and activities, and thus move towards independently "living and doing well" (Ruyter et al., 2020, p. 2). Returning to Seligman's (2012) five wellbeing elements (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment) which he equates with flourishing, educators and librarians can consider how their school libraries create spaces for these feelings, behaviours and interactions. The kinds of lenses adopted shape the way educators place, design and resource their school libraries. If we see the school library as an informal learning space for students to explore new skills, deepen personal interests and deepen their relationships with others in the schooling context, that will transform our vision of our school libraries and enlarge our view of its potential as a space for student wellbeing and flourishing.

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### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that they have no known conflict of interest for this paper.

### **CRedit**

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection and Analysis, Writing, Supervision, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition; Author 2: Data Curation, Data Analysis, Writing.

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